



Marcia Mayeda, Director

July 26, 2021

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair  
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell  
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl  
Supervisor Janice Hahn  
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Marcia Mayeda  
Director

**REPORT BACK ON MANAGED INTAKE AND BEST PRACTICES WITHIN DACC CARE CENTERS (ITEM NO. 79, AGENDA OF JULY 13, 2021)**

On July 13, 2021, the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Department of Animal Care and Control (DACC) to report back to your Board in 15 days about:

1. The feasibility of giving the public full access to the care centers to view adoptable animals.
2. Ways to increase adoption rates.
3. Ways to decrease the euthanasia of care center animals.

**1. Feasibility of Giving the Public Full Access to the Animal Care Centers**

DACC implemented appointment-based services to be able to continue to serve the public, conduct adoptions, reunite lost pets with their families, and offer low-cost veterinary services while complying with physical distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. The appointment-based service has revolutionized how DACC serves the public; dramatically improved animal well-being in the care centers; and has created many other benefits for animals, residents, and staff.

Agoura ACC 29525 Agoura Road Agoura Hills, CA 91301 (818) 991-0071	Baldwin Park ACC 4275 N. Elton Street Baldwin Park, CA 91706 (626) 962-3577	Carson/Gardena ACC 216 W. Victoria Street Gardena, CA 90248 (310) 523-9566	Castaic ACC 31044 N. Charlie Canyon Rd. Castaic, CA 91384 (661) 257-3191	Downey ACC 11258 S. Garfield Ave. Downey, CA 90242 (562) 940-6898
Lancaster ACC 5210 W. Avenue I Lancaster, CA 93536 (661) 940-4191	Palmdale ACC 38550 Sierra Highway Palmdale, CA 93550 (661) 575-2888			Administrative Office 5898 Cherry Avenue Long Beach, CA 90805 (800) 253-3555

### Improved Customer Service

DACC's move to appointment-based services is in line with our Department's Mission, Vision, and Values and the County's Strategic Plan. DACC's appointment-based and Managed Intake programs meet Goal I - Make Investments That Transform Lives by increasing our focus on prevention initiatives and enhancing our delivery of comprehensive interventions; Goal II – Foster Vibrant and Resilient Communities by creating public-private partnerships and supporting the wellness of our communities; and Goal III – Realize Tomorrow's Government Today by adopting innovative, flexible, and effective programs; embracing digital government for the benefit of our customers and communities; pursuing operational effectiveness, fiscal responsibility, and accountability; and engaging our customers, communities, and partners.

Under full public access, potential adopters would often leave in frustration without an animal because the process was too difficult due to the heavy foot traffic and long in-person customer waiting lines. Under the appointment-based system, they no longer stand in long lines and then rush through the adoption process. Adopters have expressed great satisfaction with the appointment process.

Every customer request is unique, and by using appointments to provide services DACC staff can anticipate needs and be better prepared to devise an outcome plan for each animal. Appointments are conducted with a case management approach emphasizing the individual human-animal bond. Preliminary phone or email exchanges are conducted prior to in-person services and prepare visitors for a successful customer service experience. With scheduled services, staff can provide individualized adoption services to best help a family connect with the pet most suited for their home, ensuring a meaningful and lasting placement for that animal.

### Improved Animal Well-Being

Animal well-being has dramatically improved because the appointment system fosters healthy and nurturing environments for the animals. The constant foot traffic of full public access caused constant barking and agitation, creating a chaotic, disruptive atmosphere in the care centers that caused fear, anxiety, and stress for the animals. The animals were in a constant state of agitation and had no relief from public disruption.

Under the appointment system the animals are much more relaxed. A calmer and quieter atmosphere allows animals to relax, feel safer, and present better when

potential adopters make an appointment to meet them. Able to sleep more and experience less stress, their immune systems are stronger. In fact, DACC's veterinary medical teams have seen dramatic decreases in upper respiratory infections, the most common ailment brought on by shelter environments – a 53 percent decrease for dogs and an 82 percent decrease for cats.

DACC first observed the difference a quiet and calm care center environment makes several years ago when we partnered with Annenberg PetSpace (PetSpace) when we transported adoptable animals to them for placement. The veterinarian in charge at PetSpace reported that when the program began she thought the animals from DACC were very sick because they slept for the first three days after arriving at their facility; however, upon examination she discovered they were not ill but merely exhausted.

That was what life was for the animals in the animal care centers (ACCs) under full public access. With appointment-based services DACC can provide a much more nurturing environment where animals can rest and thrive. Fearful animals adapt more readily and can have a better chance of a positive outcome. All animals are more rested and better prepared to adjust to their new family's home.

Additionally, ACCs are not and should not be like zoos where animals are on display for public amusement and education. Zoos have natural habitats that are species-specific for the animals, visitors are kept at a far more comfortable distance from the animals, and the animals have hiding places they can retreat to if they want to avoid people or feel safe. Zoo animals are removed from public display if they are ill or exhibit behavioral problems. The ACCs are designed for basic care and containment and animals are kept in enclosures where people can closely interact with and disturb them. When operating with full public access, DACC staff had to often ask the public not to shake or kick kennels, stick fingers through the chain link or cage barriers, and engage in other behavior disruptive and frightening to the animals.

This type of situation has been identified by nationally recognized "America's Veterinarian," Dr. Marty Becker, in his Fear Free Shelters program, which identifies minimizing movement, loud sounds, and people looking into cages as key to reducing fear, anxiety, and stress in shelter animals. DACC has provided Fear Free training to its staff and volunteers and relies on this gold standard for managing the animals' environment in our care.

### Suitability of Animal Care Center Design

It should also be noted that DACC's aged animal care centers were not designed for modern-day animal care programming expectations. Except for the Palmdale ACC, all County care centers are between 45-75 years old, with a median age of 59 years, and not consistent with today's animal housing and public service models. To address this, the Department submitted its Facilities Master Plan to your Board in January 2020 for your consideration for facility renovations or replacements. New care centers can provide more enriching environments for the animals and better facilities for serving the community. Appointment-based services are the best approach for the current animal care facilities.

### Use of Technology to Promote Animal Adoptions

DACC is constantly focused on bringing visibility to all adoptable animals through current photos on our website and social media posts highlighting individual animals. DACC staff also conduct weekly virtual tours at several care centers, as well as live Instagram feeds, to feature dogs socializing in the play yards. The Department uses online Trello software to create visual boards that feature pictures and videos of cats and dogs in need of rescue by Adoption Partners and to feature animals being fostered in volunteer homes

The Department has also considered people without internet access. Care centers have reserved specific times throughout the day for same-day appointments to assist them, address emergency situations, to assist owners looking for their pets, or people in need of other services that can be resolved by providing a same-day appointment. DACC's Communications Center operates 24 hours a day, 7 day a week (24/7) to answer questions about the adoption and intake processes as well as advise callers of the various ways to access services and make appointments.

### Managed Intake of Animals – Alternatives to Care Center Admissions

The appointment-based system is a key factor to the success of the Department's implementation of Managed Intake as part of its adoption of the nationally recognized animal sheltering model known as Socially Conscious Animal Sheltering (SCAS), adopted by your Board on August 6, 2019. Under the Managed Intake model, DACC has seen a 46 percent decrease of animals admitted into its care centers largely by investing more time in providing alternatives to care center admission. This dramatic reduction means there are far fewer animals in need of

adoption. The reduced population aligns well with appointment-based adoption services where individualized support is provided for the adopter and the animals.

This strategy aligns DACC practices with the needs and resources of the community to change the practice of accepting every animal into ACCs without some measure of control. By partnering with the community to identify other options for stray and unwanted animals and providing solutions to the problems that bring these animals to its doors, DACC acts as a resource center to keep pets and families together or provides alternatives to care center admission. Managed Intake prioritizes situations in which receiving a pet into our care is the best or only option for that animal and creates more resources for animals that require enhanced treatment or attention in the care centers.

In January 2020, DACC began working with the Koret Shelter Medicine Program (KSMP) of UC Davis to work on our capacity for care, a functional assessment and operational determination to provide a holistic approach in meeting the needs of each animal that is admitted into the ACCs. The program also investigates strategies on how DACC can provide alternatives to care center admission and be a resource for the animals and people in the community. This partnership, at no cost to DACC and made possible by a grant to KSMP, started with the training of 30 DACC leaders and continues with regular consultations to develop and implement programs that allow each care center to function in accordance with the Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare.

#### Owner-Surrendered Animals

When an owner considers relinquishing a pet, DACC first recommends and offers resources such as training and behavior advice, food and supplies, or support with other solutions to help keep the pet in the home. The most common reasons for pet surrender to DACC are medical care costs and housing issues. Under Managed Intake, DACC staff discuss these concerns with owners and refer them to resources that will allow them to reconsider surrendering their pets. DACC offers a CARE voucher funded by the Los Angeles County Animal Care Foundation that provides financial assistance to help families keep their pets.

Other times owners are simply frustrated with behavioral problems or lack the resources to fix fencing or address other one-time needs. With support to resolve these issues, pets can remain with the family that already knows, wants, and loves them. If a pet owner is still unable or unwilling to keep their pet, DACC provides advice and its *Home to Home* service through the ACCs' Facebook pages to owners

to rehome their pets themselves and avoid surrendering their pets to an ACC. This can be a less stressful outcome for both pets and their owners and saves valuable and limited animal housing space for those animals at the care centers who have no other options. If the owner is unable to rehome their pet on their own, DACC will accept it and seek the best possible outcome for that animal.

### Stray Animals

Most stray animals are found within a few miles of their homes and methods other than care center intake may more quickly and economically reunite these lost pets with their families. DACC encourages people who have found lost pets (if they are able) to first attempt reuniting the pets with their families by having the pets scanned for microchips, using neighborhood and social media apps to publicize found pets, and posting fliers in the neighborhood. DACC recommends effective pet reunification strategies, provides templates for flyers to post in neighborhoods, and offers other suggestions to engage the neighborhood and community. When finders are not successful or are unable to engage in these activities, DACC will accept the animals to ensure the safety of both the animals and the public.

### Free-Roaming Cats

Healthy free-roaming cats are generally deferred from care center admission because they are thriving in their current environment. Many free-roaming cats have a human family and vary their time between the home and outdoors. Bringing these cats to a care center removes them from their home territories, and owners generally don't look for them at care centers for many days. Unfortunately, the owner redemption rate for cats is less than five percent.

Other times, a home or group of homes is providing food and water to unowned neighborhood cats. These cats have established themselves as part of their neighborhood and do not need care center assistance. Prior to Managed Intake at DACC, approximately 50 percent of cats admitted to the care centers were euthanized. That number has dropped to 31 percent because healthy free-roaming cats can remain where they live.

### Kittens

Additionally, DACC launches the "Got Kittens?" campaign each year to address the seasonal influx of kittens into ACCs. By educating the public about identifying whether kittens are truly abandoned by their mother and in need of immediate

assistance, more kittens can remain with their mothers during the critical nursing stage until weaned. This approach is healthier for kittens and improves their chance to later be successfully adopted. If the kittens have actually been abandoned by their mother DACC provides education, fostering supplies, and veterinary care for community members who enjoy caring for them until they are old enough for adoption through DACC or other resources.

Underage kittens admitted to ACCs without their mothers are in fact the most common reason for animal euthanasia. DACC is meeting community goals of lifesaving by preventing the unnecessary admission of kittens to its ACCs and expanding its volunteer foster program. Any cats or kittens that are malnourished, ill, injured, or require assistance are welcomed at DACC so they can receive the care they need.

DACC is also exploring opportunities to expand low-cost spay/neuter services for cats to prevent the birth of unwanted kittens. On June 26, 2021, DACC piloted the successful *Purrfect Fix* cat spay/neuter event at the Lancaster ACC, where 45 community cats were sterilized and has planned three more spay/neuter events in the coming months.

Community engagement is the key to successfully employing a Managed Intake approach. DACC has found that many community members, given the appropriate training and resources, would like to retain their pet, help a lost pet find its way home, or prevent unnecessary euthanasia of healthy, adult cats and underage kittens. By viewing the community as an extension of DACC, the collaboration benefits vulnerable animals, is more rewarding for the people who care about them, and increases DACC's capacity to provide services to those animals with no other options than to be admitted into care. ACCs serve as community resource centers by aligning animals and owners in need with the resources they need, when they need them.

### **Other Benefits**

The work environment for staff at the care centers has greatly improved. Because of appointment-based services, the care centers are less chaotic and staff better able to perform their daily tasks without constant interruption. Employee injuries have reduced by 44 percent because staff are less rushed and prone to injury. Overtime expense has decreased by 33 percent because staff are less likely to use sick time to recover from the emotional and physical challenges of working under a full public access model. These absences had to be backfilled by other employees who have

already worked a full week, thus generating overtime expenses. “Compassion fatigue” characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion from euthanizing healthy adult cats, underage kittens, and adoptable animals has reduced because other options for these animals are now available.

Managed Intake has reduced DACC’s Animal Care Attendant (ACA) staffing deficit for animal care from 43 percent to zero, allowing DACC to align with basic industry standards for animal caretaking. The National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA) recommends a *minimum* of 15 staff minutes per animal each day for basic feeding and cleaning. DACC has historically staffed at a much lower level due to budget constraints. It should be noted that ACAs perform other non-caretaking duties such as supporting Managed Intake and as DACC continues to evolve in this new approach, more staffing resources may be needed to provide alternatives to care center admission services. However, the animal caretaking deficit has been eliminated for the first time in DACC’s history.

Because fewer animals require to be admitted under Managed Intake, DACC saved \$1M in care center supply costs for the 15-month period of April 2020 through June 2021 versus the previous 15 months. These include, but are not limited to, medical supplies, office supplies, animal equipment, and animal food. These savings, as well as the reduced intake of animals, will reduce costs to the cities that contract with DACC for animal care and control services.

Managed Intake has made more space available for animals in dire need of assistance. During the Bobcat Fire, DACC was able to provide care and sheltering for more than 200 dogs evacuated from the fire. In the past, these dogs would have been housed in temporary crates at an area evacuation site. Because of Managed Intake, DACC had enough kennel runs available to house these dogs in more suitable and stable conditions.

DACC also now has more space available to provide temporary boarding for pets whose owners require special assistance. Many victims of domestic violence refuse to leave an abusive situation because domestic violence shelters do not allow pets and they know the abuser will harm their animal if they leave. DACC provides a program called AniSafe where domestic violence victims can bring their animals to DACC for safe and confidential boarding while they and any children escape a dangerous situation. Persons experiencing homelessness may temporarily place their pets in DACCs care while they find permanent housing, allowing them to become safely housed without having to surrender their beloved pet. Pet owners experiencing mental health crises may refuse to enter treatment facilities because

they have no resources to care for their pets. DACC also provides temporary boarding in these circumstances so the pet owners may receive the assistance they need.

### **Awards and Recognitions**

In 2021 DACC was awarded a National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award for Managed Intake and Enhanced Placement under the program category of Community and Economic Development. The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) awarded DACC a Merit award under the category of Disaster & Emergency Response/Management in 2020. Both awards were for DACC's new practices that include appointment-based services, Managed Intake, and enhanced placement programs.

DACC's new approach to services has received national attention in the animal welfare field. In June 2021 DACC leaders presented DACC's achievements at the Association for the Advancement of Animal Welfare's (AAWAs) Spring Conference, the Best Friends Annual Conference in June 2021, and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) Annual Expo in April 2021. DACC leaders regularly participate on national leadership calls organized by Human Animal Support Services (HASS) and statewide calls organized by the California Animal Welfare Association. Los Angeles County is recognized nationally among animal welfare professionals as a leader in progressive programming that benefits animals and the public.

## **2. Ways to Increase Adoption Rates**

Under Managed Intake and appointment-based services, live release rates have increased from 54 percent to 68 percent for cats. Dog live release rates remained steady at 88 percent, impressive because many highly adoptable dogs were provided alternatives to care center admission and the remaining dogs in the care centers were more challenging adoption candidates. For this reason, DACC is developing new key performance metrics to measure performance under this new operating model.

On August 1, the Department will be implementing a pilot program to further increase adoptions called "Love at First Sight." This pilot program is designed to increase the number of adoption appointments available to the public.

Currently, adopters interested in an animal on a stray hold may place a Commitment to Adopt (CTA) for that animal when it becomes available. Other people interested in

that same animal may opt to become an Interested Party (IP) in case the CTA doesn't adopt the pet. However, approximately 64 percent of CTAs do not adopt the animal in which they expressed interest. Further, the process of responding to hundreds of daily emails and telephone calls to CTAs and IPs is very time consuming and reduces staff's ability to provide direct public services.

The CTA and IP processes were needed under full public access in order to manage the demand and bring order to the process of serving uncontrolled numbers of visitors each day. However, under appointment-based services this should no longer be necessary.

During this pilot program, DACC will not take CTA or IP names. Adopters will be able to select any pet available for adoption on the day they visit the care center without having to be on a waiting list. Staff time no longer needed for contacting CTAs and IPs will be used toward expanding appointment times so more adopters can be served. Staff will also be available to spend more time interacting with potential adopters, helping them to find the most suitable animal for their home. They will also have more time to retake the initial photos taken of the animals, creating more appealing photographs to promote the animals on DACC's website and on social media. The Department is optimistic this new approach will increase adoptions by making the animals more attractive, readily available, and providing more appointment times to the public to meet the animals.

DACC will work with your offices and its contract cities to promote messaging about the Managed Intake and appointment processes and services available at the ACCs.

### **3. Ways to Decrease Euthanasia Rates**

Managed Intake decreases the number of animals euthanized because it reduces intake. The Department is providing intervention services to pet owners, alternative means for reuniting lost pets and their families, foster programs for kittens, and declining healthy stray cats that are thriving in their current situations. Dog euthanasia dropped from 2,271 dogs in FY 19-20 to 1,211 dogs in FY 20-21. Cat euthanasia dropped from 9,794 cats in FY 19-20 to 2,289 cats in FY 20-21.

By providing Managed Intake, animals admitted to the care centers are those for whom no other option exists. Many are in greater need of medical and behavioral interventions. Managed Intake provides more time and resources to rehabilitate and give these animals the best chance of a positive outcome. Because the types of

animals now admitted into care have more challenges, DACC is developing new key performance metrics to measure performance under this new operating model.

Another key factor in reducing the number of unwanted/homeless animals that face euthanasia is to mandate and/or promote the spaying or neutering and microchipping of pets. Spayed or neutered animals do not roam in search of mates and cannot reproduce and create more unwanted animals that overburden care centers, thereby driving euthanasia numbers. Microchipping provides permanent identification and ownership information so lost pets may be returned to their families instead of waiting to be adopted or risk being euthanized. Your Board adopted mandatory spaying or neutering and microchipping for dogs in 2006 and for cats in 2015. These ordinance requirements have been adopted by 28 of the 45 cities that contract with DACC for service. DACC regularly recommends to cities who do not have these requirements to adopt them so pet euthanasia can be further reduced in their cities and provides a spay/neuter voucher program that cities can join to provide this resource to their residents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Department strongly recommends it continue with the appointment-based system to provide better care for the animals and improve service to the public. The benefits of DACC serving constituents by appointment only are numerous and significant. Appointments eliminate long public waiting lines and allow DACC to provide individualized services to adopters and those needing resources to keep or rehome pets. Controlled foot traffic improves the well-being of animals in the care centers by reducing their fear, anxiety, and stress. Animals are healthier as evidenced by decreased occurrence of upper respiratory illnesses. Fearful animals have greater chances of rehabilitation and adoption because the stress of full public access is minimized. Adoptions are more personalized, robust, and fulfilling. DACC provides opportunities to view adoptable animals 24/7 on its website and through various social media platforms. The appointment-based system has brought order to care center operations, creating a safer and more positive working environment and reducing employee injury and overtime.

The adoption program will be made more effective with the beginning of a pilot program on August 1, 2021, that will increase adoption appointment times and should make the process even more efficient for the adopters. The “Love at First Sight” pilot program will eliminate the difficult CTA and IP practice that was needed under full public access and make the adoption program more effective. The Department will report back to your Board in 120 days regarding the results of the pilot program.

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Managed Intake reduces the euthanasia of animals that do not need to come into the care centers: free-roaming cats, underage kittens, pets that have homes whose owners need financial help, and lost pets that can otherwise be reunited with their families. It is a thoughtful public policy to create the best outcomes for all animals while valuing the human-animal bond. By engaging the community, more pets and families can remain together, and lost pets are more quickly reunited with their families. Limited governmental resources are preserved for those animals and people with no other options.

Various state and national organizations support DACC's improved systems of appointment-based services and Managed Intake. These include the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), the National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA), Best Friends Animal Society, Human Animal Support Services (HASS), and the UC Davis Koret School of Veterinary Medicine.

For all these reasons, as well as the current disturbing increase in COVID-19 transmissions in Los Angeles County, DACC recommends continuing appointment-based services. Even after the public health threat has passed, appointment-based services should continue because they have been proven to improve the well-being of care center animals, reduce the euthanasia of cats and dogs, and enhance the adoption experience for residents.

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#### Attachments

c: Chief Executive Office  
County Counsel  
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors